

**No. 22.**

**U. S. SANITARY COMMISSION.**

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The following statement of the considerations which led to the appointment of this Commission by the War Department, of the purposes to which its funds are applied, and of the work it hopes to accomplish if adequately sustained by the Public, is intended for the satisfaction of those who may be invited to aid it by contributions of money or otherwise.

**I.—ORIGIN OF THE COMMISSION.**

The important duty of devising measures for the protection of the health of the U. S. Army, and for its preservation from the diseases to which soldiers are peculiarly exposed, belongs to a branch of the War Department known as the Medical Bureau, by which it has always been executed with ability and success.

At an early stage of the war, however, it became manifest that the large and sudden increase of the army must throw on this Bureau an amount of work to which it was necessarily unequal.

Having been organized with reference to the wants of an

army of only a few thousand men, it was likely to be most seriously embarrassed in its operations when called on to provide for a newly levied force of several hundred thousand—especially as both officers and men of these hastily assembled regiments were mostly without experience, and required immediate and extraordinary instruction and supervision to save them from the consequences of exposure, malaria, unwholesome food, and the other perils of camp life.

These are practically the gravest and most formidable dangers to which soldiers in actual service are exposed. Under the most favorable conditions an army loses, in the course of a campaign, at least four times as many men by disease as by the casualties of actual warfare. Among newly levied and inexperienced soldiers the ratio is much larger. Neglect of sanitary precautions in camp, quarters, and hospitals, is almost inevitably followed by epidemics, the appearance of which may paralyze the operations of a whole army, and result in a public calamity more serious than the loss of a great battle.

In view of this danger, and of the pressure upon the Medical Bureau arising from the increase and the active employment of the regular army, the War Department decided to appoint a commission to aid and co-operate with it in providing for the sanitary interests of the newly raised volunteer forces. This step was taken on the suggestion of the Acting Surgeon-General, and with the formal approval of the President.

A copy of the order appointing the Commission is annexed.

## 2.—OBJECTS OF THE COMMISSION.

These are generally indicated by the order of the Secretary of War. But those who are invited to contribute to its support

are entitled to a more specific statement of the objects to which their contributions will be applied.

The employment of Sanitary Agents or Inspectors to reside in or near the several great military centres is deemed of great importance. Of these six have been already employed and are in the field, at various points from the Chesapeake to the Missouri. If the Commission were provided with means to employ twenty instead of six, the community at large would thereby probably save ten times the additional outlay. These Inspectors act under detailed instructions and make weekly reports to the resident Secretary of the Commission (Fred'k L. Olmsted, Esq.) at Washington. Their duties are, generally, to visit the camps, barracks, quarters, and regimental hospitals, systematically and regularly, with a view to discover and remedy defects in their drainage, ventilation, &c., in the quality of the food and water supplied the men, in the system (if any) of camp cooking, in clothing, camp police, medicines, bedding, and hospital stores, in the supply of disinfectants, and in every other particular by which the health of the troops can be affected. It is the natural and excusable ignorance of a very large proportion of our newly appointed volunteer officers on these and other sanitary points, and the fact that they do not appreciate the immense importance of attending to them daily and systematically, which constitute the chief source of peril to our troops. Officers generally take it for granted that their duty toward their men begins and ends with drill and parade, forgetting that camp disease is by far the most dangerous enemy they have to fear, and at the same time the only enemy against which vigilance and precaution are almost certain of success. It is believed that the constant attention and care of intelligent and educated inspectors charged with the sole duty of watching over the sanitary condition of camps, &c., and of calling the



attention of officers and men to the serious defects that are almost invariably found there, is the only available remedy for this evil.

The Inspectors thus far employed are members of the medical profession, of high standing, and have made sanitary science a special pursuit. The actual and necessary expenses of each while engaged in his duties (travelling included) cannot be estimated at a rate less than fifteen hundred dollars per annum. Though they are clothed with no official power to order the correction of the evils they find existing, their advice and suggestions have generally been thus far gratefully received and promptly carried out, at least for the time. Even with the small number of agents the Commission has thus far been enabled to employ, great good has been effected, many abuses have been corrected, and (it is confidently believed) many lives have been saved.

Resident agents are also needed to act as inspectors of the General Hospitals at Washington and elsewhere. One has been appointed and is now engaged in his duties. These are analogous to those required of the Camp Inspectors, and with the additional charge of seeing that the volunteers, while in hospital, have all the care and comfort that professional skill, good nursing, and intelligent liberality can give them. Funds are also required to supply both General and Regimental Hospitals with various surgical and other appliances, (and, if possible, with comforts) which the Medical Department does not supply—such as water-beds, wire frames to keep bed clothes from contact with wounded limbs, and other articles well known in private surgical and medical practice. Extra hospital clothing, additional supplies, and model appliances have already been provided by the Commission as liberally as the funds under its control would justify. Large supplies of ice for the Hospitals (furnished by private liberality) have been forwarded to Wash-

ington at the expense of the Commission, and most thankfully received.

Though the hospital stores furnished by Government are abundant, and excellent of their kind, the list of articles it provides has been, of course, made up with reference solely to the wants of the regular army. But among the rank and file of our volunteers are to be found representatives from every class in society, including many to whom certain additional comforts are matter of necessity, the want of which retards convalescence, if it do not prevent recovery, and those comforts the Commission hopes to be enabled in some degree to provide, without distinction, to all who need them.

The Commission proposes also to distribute among officers and men printed rules for the preservation of health in camp, calling their attention particularly to the various points already alluded to as involving danger. It will also issue from time to time other publications, intended to direct the attention of the military authorities to such sanitary reforms and improvements as experience and observation may suggest.

It is in constant receipt of supplies of stores, clothing, and other articles contributed by patriotic individuals and associations throughout the country, which involve large outlay for expense of transportation and storage.

It will be called upon to pay the wages of male nurses for the hospitals, and sundry other necessary expenses not provided by Government.

Other minor sources of expense, such as advertising, insurance, telegraphing, postage, clerk-hire, &c., need not be specified.

It will be perceived that the chief objects for which funds are required are the employment of camp and hospital inspectors, the supply of certain extra hospital appliances, and the printing and circulation of documents.

For these purposes, and supposing the inspectors to receive compensation at the rate of six hundred dollars per annum over and above their necessary expenses,\* and that twenty-five are employed by the Commission (and a smaller number cannot do the work required), an annual expenditure of not less than sixty thousand dollars is required.

It is for the community to decide whether it can or will furnish this large sum, and whether it will not, in the end, save money by enabling the Commission to do its work thoroughly and efficiently.

It should be remembered that the life of every soldier who dies of disease, which sanitary precautions could have averted, is simply wasted, or worse than wasted, since others must be withdrawn from duty to provide for his wants during his illness. Each of our volunteers (regarded from the lowest possible point of view) represents a certain considerable amount of mere money value to the nation at large, and this value is steadily increasing day by day, as he gains experience in his daily duties. If he is allowed to perish because he has no one to advise him or his officers that a camp badly policed is sure to breed a pestilence—that the air within an ill-ventilated tent is converted into poisonous gas—and that ill-cooked or ill-kept food will produce dysentery—the community which permits him so to perish for want of advice and help, and which (in many cases) burthens itself, moreover, with the support of a destitute family, is, to say the least, guilty of reckless extravagance, peculiarly inexpedient at the present time. No economy can be more effective in the prosecution of the present just

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\* Most of the Inspectors thus far employed have consented to serve without compensation beyond their actual expenses, but it is hardly to be hoped that a sufficient number of educated and competent men can be found who will labor effectively and permanently on these terms.



and necessary war than an exacting, vigilant, and scrupulous economy of the health and life of every volunteer soldier we send into the field.

With sufficient means at its command, the Commission, cordially sustained as it is by the authorities at Washington, can do much to promote this great national object.

It is to be borne in mind, however, that the seeds of mischief are already sown, by months of negligence and disregard of sanitary precautions. It is to be feared that these will soon bear their legitimate fruit, and that we shall hear of epidemics in our camps, and malignant forms of disease in the General Hospitals. It is probably too late to completely avert these evils. What the Commission has already done—though necessarily on a limited scale—will no doubt diminish their severity; and during the few weeks that are still left before the perilous fall months are upon us, the Commission hopes to make still further progress, and do much to mitigate the evils by which the army is threatened. The extent to which it shall be able to do so depends mainly on the amount of means which the community shall place at its disposal.

### 3.—AID FROM GOVERNMENT.

It has been suggested that the Commission ought to look to Government for the money it requires, instead of appealing to private liberality.

This question was fully considered by the Commission at its meetings held in Washington before and during the late session of Congress. It came to the conclusion that the application to Congress for pecuniary aid was for many reasons inexpedient.

Among these reasons were the following: The Commission has little or no official power, and can accomplish its objects

only through whatever moral weight and influence it may possess. These would be impaired if not destroyed, in public estimation at least, were the Commission to appear among the crowds that fill the lobbies of Congress. The mere suspicion that it was connected with political agencies would paralyze its usefulness. There was reason to apprehend that a grant of money from Congress, if obtained at all, would be obtained on terms and conditions as to the appointment of agents, and the application of funds that would impair the efficiency of its operations. It was certain, moreover, that any appropriation that could reasonably be expected would fall far short of the amount required. To make up the deficiency, the Commission would therefore still be obliged to rely on the liberality of individuals. And it was thought probable that an appeal to the public for support would be wholly in vain, were the Commission actually in receipt of any amount, however small, of funds derived from the Public Treasury.

On these and other grounds the Commission determined to rely for support on the community at large, and every indication up to the present time justifies it in taking that course.

The whole subject is commended to the consideration of those who have at heart the interests of the army and of the Nation. Members of the Commission rely with entire confidence on the good sense, the patriotism, and the charitable instincts of their fellow-citizens for means to enable them to carry out the work they have undertaken.

New York, August 13th, 1861.

On behalf of the Commission,

W. H. VAN BUREN, M.D.

ELISHA HARRIS, M.D.

CORNS. R. AGNEW, M.D.

GEO. T. STRONG, Treasurer.



## ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF WAR.

WAR DEPARTMENT, }  
 WASHINGTON, June 9th, 1861. }

The Secretary of War has learned with great satisfaction, that at the instance, and in pursuance of the suggestion of the Medical Bureau, in a communication to this office, dated May 22d, 1861, Henry W. Bellows, D. D., Prof. A. D. Bache, L. L. D., Prof. Jeffries Wyman, M. D., Prof. Wolcott Gibbs, M. D., W. H. Van Buren, M. D., Samuel G. Howe, M. D., Dr. R. C. Wood, U. S. A., G. W. Cullum, U. S. A., Alexander E. Shiras, U. S. A., have mostly consented in connection with such others as they may choose to associate with them, to act as "A Commission of Inquiry and Advice in respect of the Sanitary Interests of the United States Forces," and without remuneration from the Government. The Secretary has submitted their patriotic proposal to the consideration of the President who directs the acceptance of the service thus generously offered.

The Commission, in connection with a Surgeon of the U. S. A., to be designated by the Secretary, will direct its enquiries to the principles and practices connected with the inspection of recruits and enlisted men, to the sanitary condition of the volunteers; to the means of preserving and restoring the health, and of securing the general comfort and efficiency of troops; to the proper provision of cooks, nurses, and hospitals; and to other subjects of like nature.

The Commission will frame such rules and regulations in respect of the objects and modes of its enquiry as may seem best adapted to the purpose of its constitution, which when approved by the Secretary, will be established as general guides of its investigations and action.

